THE PATRICIANS

By ELEANOR M. INGRAM

YOU are asking about that fair-haired boy whom you saw here three years ago? Well, I can trust you with the tale, although truly it is a sign of old age that I should find such pleasure in the thought of telling it. I will answer to your unspoken wonder that I, a Jew and once a rabbi among my own people, should be a servant in this Spanish house.

It was when the Inquisition first stirred here in Catalonia that Señor Genaro snatched me from its grasp and brought me to his home. You know what he was, the richest merchant in Barcelona, one of her counselors; under his roof I dwelt in safety when death hunted my people throughout Spain. I became his steward and served him faithfully, he and his. When he fell ill he sent for me and charged me to care likewise for his son's interests until he grew to manhood. So much trust had he in one of an outcast race.

"And when age comes upon you, Jesse, then Luis will care for you in his turn," he said. "Promise, both."

I gave my word solemnly, sorrow in my heart. The Señorito Luis was leaning against the couch, not quite ten years old he was then, and raising his great dark eyes he gazed at me steadily.

"I promise, and I will remember, father," he said.

That was nearly twenty years ago. As the little señorito grew, our friendship grew also. I saw my kinsmen driven from Spain and I remained; for his sake I concealed my birth and faith and lived in hiding. But his affairs prospered on my hands, for my race have that talent. When the Señor Luis was in his twenty-third year the first change came into our lives; the gentle, sad Señora died and left the great house desolate. She was the only affection of the young master, and a grief fell upon him that shut the sunlight from his heart. The lonely house was intolerable to him, the silent echoing rooms, and he began to take long voyages with his different ships. Young as he was he held an important place among the merchant princes of the city. So it went on for months, and I watched in vain for the cloud to lift from his brow.

I remember it was in the spring of 1490 that I was called down to the wharf with the message that the *Mariposa* was coming into port. On that ship Señor Luis had made the voyage to Genoa and, rejoicing, I hastened down to meet him.

I arrived just as he stepped from the small boat and turned to assist a yellow-haired boy you saw, a youth then of seventeen or eighteen, fair as an English girl except for his black brows and long-lashed black eyes. Very frail and ill he looked, and the young master put his arm around him and held out the other hand to me, as I stood, wondering.

"We have come home, good Jesse," he said. "Make my brother welcome also."

I looked from one to the other, not only with jealousy, no, but with anxiety, for well I knew Señor Luis would not give that name without giving all it meant. The stranger glanced at me, then turned his head impatiently.

"Let us go out of the sun, Luis, it hurts my eyes," he said.

I led the way to the house without a word. He had the most beautiful voice I ever heard, low, golden, clear, and with a slow distinctness of speech.

That night Señor Luis told me where he had found this alien; we sat on the broad balcony overlooking the ocean, and against the moonlight I could see his grave, earnest profile. You know these Catalans, all Spanish in their reserve and dignity, but beneath the surface the Provençal fire burning restlessly. In the Mediterranean the *Mariposa* had met a Moorish pirate and engaged in a fierce battle. The master's ship was victorious, and on searching the enemy they found this boy chained in the hold. During the voyage Señor Luis nursed him back to health and consciousness, but to find his memory gone. He knew nothing of his life before he awoke in the *Mariposa* and found Señor Luis bending over him, not even his name or nationality. Evidently he had understood Spanish, and now spoke it because it was the language in which the master had first addressed him, but he was not a Spaniard.

"He has no one but me," Señor Luis said, "and except for you, Jesse, I am almost as much alone. He shall share all I have, even my name."

I listened in silence, seeing that he was deeply moved, and myself jealous of this new affection that had so coiled around his heart. This boy that the ocean had cast at our feet, could he guard the treasure so freely given, or into the Venetian crystal of my master's spirit would he pour the poison that might shatter it? But I recognized the quiet finality of Señor Luis's accent; as he said, so would it be.

And so it was. His name was Luis Carlos; the boy was called Carlos Genaro. There were two masters in the house, two who owned the great ships that brought to our door the gems and spices and perfumed Cordovan leather. Was it for me to protest while I watched return to Señor Luis's face the brightness that had gone with the Señora?

Although there was a difference of scarcely five years in their ages, Señor Carlos had a childish dislike for being away from the master, and a dependence upon him that drew the links still closer. Señor Luis was by nature one of those who support and protect, and he was touched and pleased by the other's need of him. Yet at the same time Señor Carlos had a petulant willfulness in little things to which the master usually submitted indulgently. Before the first year was completed the household had almost forgotten that he had not always been with us.

But he and I were never friends; to him I was simply a servant, to me he was a stranger I did not trust. I suspected he was of noble blood: his delicacy of appearance, a certain imperious manner suggested it; and when suddenly vexed his hand would fly involuntarily to his side as if in search of a sword. On one of the rare occasions when I went out with him, a party of cavaliers galloped through the street and we were forced to step aside. To my amazement he turned to me with his face absolutely distorted by passion.

"How dare they?" he gasped. "Insolent, to drive me aside, me! If I could kill them!"

"Señor, they have the right of way," I observed.

He looked at me, his black brows knit, and answered nothing.

Señor Luis had always lived very quietly, reading much and finding pleasure in his own house. But after the first few months he offered to open the doors of Barcelona to his adopted brother. Señor Carlos refused almost rudely and chose to shut himself away from every one. The master regarded it as an evidence of their sufficiency for each other and loved him all the more, but somehow the impression remained with me that since he could not have the young nobles, he would have no one less.

Still all these thoughts were vague and floating under the current of small events that made up our lives. So we continued for three years a serene household, and gradually I learned to be glad Señor Luis had so filled his empty life. His very voice was gentler when he spoke to him, and Señor Carlos cared enough in his own way.

In the fall of 1492 the king and queen came to Barcelona for the first time in many years. The proud and willful Catalans had often been called disloyal, and now they threw themselves into giving such a welcome as should prove the reproach false. The city was in a fever of excitement and preparation in which we did not escape our share. Señor Carlos especially was eager and interested. The day of the arrival every street was gay with banners and brilliant colors, every balcony crowded with laughing ladies and their cavaliers, and our house was no exception.

I was standing behind Señor Luis as the royal party passed, and Señor Carlos was leaning excitedly over the rail; both were of course bareheaded, and the sunlight struck sharply across the latter's fair curls. Queen Isabella had just gone by, when I saw a swift change sweep over the master's face, and he gave a startled exclamation. Following his gaze I too cried out, for among the glittering train of ladies, Señor Carlos's face looked up at us, his, yet not his; the face of a girl lovely beyond description, of rose and snow, of gold and velvet darkness contrasting as in him. Her great eyes were fixed on Señor Carlos, and I saw her sway in her saddle as she gazed. Her lips moved, but the tumult of cheering drowned the words.

"Fiora!" Señor Carlos cried sharply. "Fiora! Come to me, Luis. No, hush, I can almost remember. That is Fiora, and I——"

Señor Luis sprang to his side and put his arm around him.

"Find out who she is, Jesse," he ordered briefly. "Carlos, my brother."

"Not Carlos, no," he panted. "I *will* remember. Luis, you saw her by the queen; I am noble then, I am *not* a bourgeois."

I looked at Señor Luis, then went out and closed the door.

In the confusion of the city my errand was not easy of accomplishment, and dusk had fallen when I returned. I found Señor Luis in the gray, unlighted salon.

"Well?" he asked.

"The lady is not a Spaniard, Señor, but a Sicilian of high rank who is a guest of the queen. She is Doña Fiora di Valdi, daughter of the Duke of Ariano."

I had thought we were alone, but Señor Carlos started from a chair in the shadow.

"That is it," he cried, his voice ringing through the room. "Fiora; and I am Paolo di Valdi. I know now, it has come back, all, all."

A silence fell upon us which he was the first to break.

"I remember the day I left Palermo; I could describe every street in

"'YOU ARE THE MERCHANT WHO TOOK THIS BOY FROM THE WRECK OF THE GIGLIO?' HE ASKED"

the city, every room in the Palazzo Ariano. Fiora is my twin sister. The Moors attacked the ship and some one struck me from behind. Send for Fiora, I will claim my own place in the world. I knew no plebeian blood ran in my veins."

"It is not possible to send for Doña Fiora," Señor Luis answered. "To-morrow we will go to her."

"To-night, write to-night and tell her I am here," he urged impatiently.

"Pardon, but the lady herself saw Señor Carlos," I suggested.

"Call me that no longer," he exclaimed. "Give me my own title."

"No," Señor Luis said with a sternness that startled us both. "While you are in this house you are Carlos Genaro, no more. If you de-

mand this of Jesse you must of me also; do you wish me to call you Don Paolo?"

"The cases are very different," he answered sullenly.

"Jesse, I thank you for an errand well performed," the master said turning to me. "To-morrow I will ask you to carry a note to the lady, I can trust no one of less tact."

He struck a bell on his table and a servant brought lamps. I saw them in the sudden light as I went out, Señor Luis calm and very pale, feverish excitement in Señor Carlos's flushed face and exultant eyes.

At the head of the great staircase one of the servants came to me.

"There is a man below, Señor," he said, "who has asked so many questions about the house and the master that we grew suspicious. Will you see him?"

I went down and found a small dark man talking to a group of the servants. At sight of me he came forward.

"I have the honor of seeing the master?" he asked with a pronounced Italian accent.

"No, I am the steward," I answered in his own language, which was familiar enough to every merchant who trafficked on the Mediterranean.

He looked at me keenly and came close to my side.

"Come with me," he said eagerly, "the Signora has so much to ask that you can answer. You understand, she saw the Signor Don Paolo today; we believed him dead. Why has he not returned to Palermo? Come with me; these servants say you know all that happens in the house, come."

I hesitated a moment, thinking rapidly.

"Very well," I answered at last, "let us go."

He thanked me with unconcealed delight and led the way. We went through the gay illuminated streets straight to the palace. There he left me in a small room and went in search of his mistress, the mistress whom I hated for her likeness to Señor Carlos. Not to pleasure her had I come there, only to spare the Señor Luis the weary explanations that must be made. But when she parted the curtains and stood before me even my old heart quickened at her loveliness. She had come in all her splendor of white and silver from the ball whose music floated to my ears. Her bright hair was worn like a Venetian lady's, uncovered and clustering in short thick curls around her neck. So like she was to him, yet somehow different, at once statelier and more gentle, perhaps by reason of her maidenhood.

"It is you of whom Giacopo spoke?" she asked in the golden voice so strangely familiar. "Pardon, Señor, but I do not know your name; I am Fiora di Valdi."

"I am the steward of Señor Genaro, Señora," I replied. "Your servant told me you wished to ask of our household."

She took a step forward.

"Of my brother, Señor. I saw him this morning; we thought him dead three years ago. It is my brother, I am not mistaken. Oh, at first I believed him an apparition!"

"It was truth, Señora. Don Paolo recognized you also."

"But why?" she cried. "Where has he been? why did he not come home? I do not understand; why is he with strangers? Tell me, Señor, I implore you."

I looked at her and something that had stirred within me at Señor Carlos's first cry of triumph rose over my brain like a flood.

"I will tell you, Señora," I said grimly.

And I did. Once in my youth I had been credited with eloquence; if the gift was ever mine I used it that

night. I told her of this Don Paolo when the master first brought him home, ill, friendless, nameless, more helpless than a child. I painted for her the kingdom of love and tenderness into which this beggar had stepped, the passionate affection Señor Luis had lavished upon him, the honored name shared with him, a name not noble, yet inscribed in the Libro d'Oro. I unrolled those years before her like a scroll. Before I had ended she had sunk into a chair, her wide eyes fixed on mine, the breath fluttering through her parted lips.

"Oh, Señor, what is there in his own life that can win Paolo from this love?" she exclaimed when I stood silent again.

"Have no fear, Señora, his nobility is lure enough," I answered bitterly. "He only waits dawn to come to you."

She gazed at me gravely and intently.

"You will doubtless inform Señor Genaro of this visit?"

"Yes, Señora."

"Then I pray you say to him that he will add still more to the debt we owe if he will accompany my brother here to-morrow."

I bowed, and she continued hurriedly.

"You will come also?"

"I, Señora?"

She smiled, coloring, half child, half princess.

"If you will. I think I am a little afraid of your Señor Luis."

"You are the first who was ever so, Señora, unless in his anger," I answered, pleased in spite of myself that she should see in me a friend.

"And will he not be angry with me, who snatch from him his chosen brother?" she asked. "Good night, Señor, I have stayed here too long already."

I went home slowly and sought Señor Luis. Although it was near midnight he was still in the salon, alone with such thoughts as I could well imagine. He listened in silence to my story and Doña Fiora's message.

"Good, we will go to-morrow," he said when I finished. "Go now and rest, Jesse."

But all that night I watched in vain for him to leave the salon, while Señor Carlos's flickering light proved him wakeful also. That which I dreaded when the fair-haired boy first stepped upon our wharf had been accomplished.

The next morning Giacopo came to conduct us to the palace. This time Doña Fiora received us in her own suite of apartments, accompanied by a duenna. If she had spoken seriously in saying she feared Señor Luis, she concealed it well. I paused at the door, and as the others advanced she came forward to meet them. To Señor Carlos her eyes turned eagerly, but it was to Señor Luis she courtesied with deep and formal grace, speaking some words of greeting I could not hear.

"Señora, your request is the only excuse for my presence," he answered. "Your first thought belongs to your brother."

"My first thought, Señor, is of gratitude to you," she said, and turning held out her hands to Señor Carlos, who took them and kissed her on both cheeks.

Then the door was closed, and I saw no more.

I had fancied that Señor Carlos would remain in the palace, but at the end of an hour they came out again, and our party rode back as it had come. Later Señor Luis told me it was decided to say nothing of the affair until after the return to Sicily, which would be as soon as possible.

It was like Señor Carlos to demand the master's advice and assistance in arranging his departure, quietly disregarding any pain it might cause.

Doña Fiora also turned to him, but with a gentle acknowledgment of her own inexperience that disarmed resentment. They had no kinsman in Spain to aid them.

Señor Carlos himself was the first to suggest the necessity of accounting for his three years' absence, and that no one except Señor Luis could confirm his story.

"You and Jesse will be obliged to return with us, Luis," he announced quite calmly. "My father will not be easily convinced."

It was at the palace this occurred, and Doña Fiora flushed as she had already learned to do at her brother's inconsiderate speeches.

"You have not reflected, Paolo," she said with dignity. "We have no right to ask more of Señor Genaro."

"It is only a short journey, and I may meet with some difficulty without him," he retorted impatiently. "The *Lucero* is in port, you could take us both in her, Luis."

I expected a curt refusal from Señor Luis, but to my surprise he hesitated, and a sudden color burned in his clear dark cheek.

"I and my ships are at Doña Fiora's disposal," he answered.

"Is not that a phrase of gallantry?" she asked.

"No, Señora."

She regarded him, her eyes a starry night.

"I understand," she murmured, "you would keep Paolo with you a little longer. I grieve for your sorrow, Señor."

So it was decided, and in a few days the *Lucero* was ready to receive the Sicilian lady and her attendants. I watched them come on board with a heavy heart, auguring small good from this voyage. And as the days passed I saw my forebodings too well confirmed. Each league nearer Sicily increased the arrogance and condescension of Señor Carlos's manner until I could scarcely keep my self-control.

But worse mischief than his Doña Fiora was committing in all cold unconsciousness. Too proud for affectation, too serenely aware of her unattainable position, she let Señor Luis amuse her as she would have me. She would sit in her chair upon the deck and listen while he told her tales brought from all those strange lands our ships sought out, tales with the perfume of sandalwood, the gleam of jewels, the shimmer of moonlight woven in their web. Was she a woman, I wondered, or something less or more that she could rest unmoved before the gaze Señor Luis fixed upon her, the fire of the south and the constancy of the north meeting in his dark eyes?

One night I came upon him alone, leaning against the rail and watching the moonlit water rush past. I stood still and looked at him unobserved. The double weight of sorrow these Sicilians had cast upon him was unconcealed in his hour of fancied solitude. Not yet thirty, and in his face that quietly accepted suffering, that dignity that will not complain even of fate.

It was not for me to speak then or let him know that I had seen. In silence I crept away and descended the stairs, too dazed with pain to notice Doña Fiora's open door until her voice fell softly on my ears. On a sudden mad impulse I pushed aside the curtain and entered.

She was alone, reclining in an armchair and playing with a little white cat Señor Luis had given her to beguile the days on shipboard. At my entrance she glanced up in surprise.

"You, Jesse?" she exclaimed.

"Ay, Señora," I answered harshly.

She rose, endeavoring to put down the kitten, but its claws were tangled in her laces, and she faced me with it held against her breast.

"Something has happened, Jesse, something is wrong?"

"I wanted to look at you," I answered deliberately. "I have seen the master's face to-night, I wanted to set yours beside it in my memory. Permit me to wish you good night, Señora."

"You will explain your meaning before you go," she said.

"I mean, Señora, that in love for a woman lay Señora Luis's only hope of forgetting the wound your brother has dealt: that love you have taken from him."

She showed neither surprise nor anger, there was no faltering in the dark eyes set jewel-like in the wonderful fairness of her face.

"We walk in paths drawn for us before our birth," she answered. "If I possess Señor Genaro's love he gave it to me of his own will. Good night, Jesse."

I went out and left her standing there, slight and straight and proud, the kitten's snowy head pressed against her whiter throat.

The next day we dropped anchor in Palermo. I was on the deck when Señor Carlos took leave of the master with a few careless phrases of gratitude and regret. His attention was fixed on the busy harbor, the familiar sound of his own language, the streets that led to the Palazzo Ariano.

Señor Luis replied with equal brevity, almost indifferently. But when Doña Fiora and her attendants came from the cabin a sudden pallor crossed the grave composure of his face and I caught my breath in fear lest he should bare his suffering to her cold gaze. Not a word said she of conventional thanks or pleasure in the voyage, not a word of Señor Carlos, she only paused before him and sank in a courtesy so deep that it might have befitted the king.

"Farewell, Señor," she said, the music of her voice shaken into a thousand silver cadences, and offered him her hand.

Remember he had never touched her; I doubt if so much as her floating veil had ever brushed his garments. He bent his head with a visible tremor and kissed her hand, the exquisite hand of a Sicilian princess.

"Fiora!" her brother called impatiently.

From the shore a snatch of some idle sailor's song drifted across the sunlit water:

> "La cadena de oro de la vida,
> "Cuanto pesa sobre mi corazon!
> "Ay de me, que la muerte venga
> "Para robarmela, dulce ladrón."

She turned slowly away and joined Señor Carlos; the master passed me without a glance and shut himself in his cabin.

Even I felt the emptiness of the ship now they were gone, the eloquence of the deserted rooms and the Señora's vacant chair. A faint fragrance lingered in the place, a fancied gleam of golden hair. I missed, not the new Don Paolo, but the old Señor Carlos with his ready smile and childish imperiousness.

The hot day dragged away and night came and went before Señor Luis reappeared. We would sail that night, he said, and the ship was thrown into a bustle of preparation. But in the afternoon a servant brought a message for Señor Luis; the Signor Don Paolo wished to see him at once.

"I will accompany you, Señor," I ventured.

"Yes, come," he said absently.

The man did not lead us to the great marble entrance of the Palazzo, but admitted us through a door on another street. In a large round hall at the head of the stairs we found Señor Carlos awaiting us. He came forward eagerly.

"You are to see my father at once," he announced. "I have been

watching to see you first. Luis, everything depends on you."

"I do not understand," Señor Luis said. The other betrayed some embarrassment.

"I never told you, Luis, but my father and I were not on good terms. You know there are other sons, and my recovery is of little importance to him. He seems to think my former conduct was such as to demand an account of how I passed these three years."

"I can assure him they were spent quietly and honorably," Señor Luis answered, regarding him sadly. "Carlos, all that was evil slept with your memory, and awoke with it."

The Sicilian shook his head impatiently.

"Perhaps, that is over. Luis, if you tell my father that I took a merchant's name and station, worked at your trade, he will turn me away without compunction. It will seem to him an unpardonable disgrace. You must not tell him of our life together."

"What shall I tell him?" he demanded.

"Anything except the truth."

"I will not. Say what you wish and I shall not contradict you, that is enough," Señor Luis retorted, flushing scarlet at the insult. "Stand aside, Carlos, I am going."

Señor Carlos flung himself before him, barring the way.

"If you go now you will rob me of home and name," he gasped. "You will take all from me, all, because you are angry, to punish me because I would not stay in your petty life. I do not believe in your virtue, Luis Genaro, it is revenge!"

Señor Luis stopped.

"That is not true, and you know it," he said sternly. "But since you have said it I will do as you ask. Hush, I warn you not to give me time to think; come now."

Señor Carlos let his hands fall with a sigh of relief and led the way to another room. At the door he paused and looked at Señor Luis with an expression so keen, so searching, as to sweep away the last traces of the careless boy we knew. Apparently satisfied with what he read, he opened the door.

"Signore, Messer Genaro," he announced.

I remained outside, seeing through the half-closed door a long room at whose other extremity an old man was seated. In his thin harsh face as he leaned forward was repeated and strengthened whatever sinister lay dormant in his son's.

"You are the merchant who took this boy from the wreck of the *Giglio*?" he asked.

Señor Luis assented, and the next few questions were lost to me; I had suddenly perceived Doña Fiora seated in the shadow. She was listening, the fringe of her black lashes resting on her cheek.

The duke's raised voice aroused me from my contemplation.

"I ask you what he has done these years. You say he has lived with honor and dignity. How? On your charity?"

"I have already explained, Signore," Señor Carlos interposed calmly. "Messer Genaro recognized my rank and agreed to maintain me until my name and country were discovered and I could repay him."

Doña Fiora half rose, I could almost hear the cry checked upon her lips.

"I did not ask *you*," the Duke retorted. "I never could trust your word, I do not now. Is this true, Messer Genaro?"

"The Signor Don Paolo would scarcely have spoken in my presence, had it been otherwise, Signore," Señor Luis said.

The sarcasm did not bring even a

passing color to Señor Carlos's cheek. As he stood in his patrician fineness, his crafty unscrupulous cleverness, I marveled that we had so failed to see in him the Sicilian noble of his time.

"Then you will see him paid, Paolo," the old man said, falling back in his chair. "You must owe nothing to him, you understand?"

"Yes, Signore," he replied tranquilly.

Doña Fiora heard without protest, she neither moved nor glanced up as Señor Luis left the room.

We went back through the echoing halls, the Duke's last words ringing in my ears.

"Owe him nothing." Nothing for that rich love squandered upon him, nothing?

We met no servants on our short journey, and at the outer door an intricate lock detained us for a moment. As it finally gave way beneath my fingers a light step sounded in the hall above. I looked up and saw Doña Fiora at the head of the staircase. Señor Luis started forward, but she made a gesture of negation and herself descended. Over her bright hair was flung a lace mantilla; contrary to her custom no jewels lightened the somber folds of her black velvet robe or decked the hand laid on the balustrade. Opposite Señor Luis she paused.

"You have come to bid me farewell, Señora? That is a gracious courtesy I shall not forget," he said with a composure whose cost I dimly fathomed.

We both believed shame at her brother's last demand had brought her to attempt an apology. But she looked at him gravely and wistfully.

"Not unless you wish, Luis," she said, her voice a breath of summer wind. "Never farewell again."

"Fiora!" he cried.

Sudden mist swept the darkness of her eyes.

"If you want me, take me with you, Luis."

Before the light that blazed into his face I turned away. Silently, reverently, he drew her within the circle of his arms. After a moment she spoke again, her fair head resting on his breast.

I meant to let you go, although it broke my heart and yours, I would have married the Venetian to whom they betrothed me. Not from pride, Luis, no, but because I thought it right. They themselves have shown me a higher duty, none the less a duty because it is my joy. Luis, forgive Paolo; a daughter of the house of Valdi, I pay a Valdi's debt."

That was three years ago. Come to the window, do you see that lady under the rose vines, a little child at her side? That is the Señora Fiora Genaro, a lily from the garden of Eden whose perfume is the breath of our hearts.